

Message Text

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45

ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 NEA-10 ISO-00 ACDA-19 IO-14 SR-02 ORM-03

EB-11 FEA-02 INT-08 OMB-01 COME-00 TRSE-00 CIAE-00

DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04

RSC-01 PRS-01 SPC-03 SS-20 USIA-15 DRC-01 /189 W

----- 059145

R 111415Z MAR 74

FM AMEMBASSY TUNIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4739

INFO USINT ALGIERS

AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

USINT DAMASCUS

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KHARTOUM

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY RABAT

AMEMBASSY ROME

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

AMEMBASSY SANAA

USCINCEUR VAIHINGEN GER

S E C R E T TUNIS 1353

DEPT PASS CAIRO

BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TS

SUBJECT: TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER'S ANALYSIS OF
CURRENT MIDDLE EAST SITUATION

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SUMMARY: FOLLOWING RETURN FROM CAIRO, TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER EXPRESSED FOLLOWING VIEWS: OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACE SETTLEMENT ARE BETTER THAN EVER BEFORE; SADAT IS STRONG; ASAD IS "REAL STATESMAN" AND IS WILLING TO ACCEPT EXISTENCE OF ISRAEL, PALESTINIAN LEADERS ARE MELLOWING; FAISAL, SADAT AND BOUMEDIENE FAVOR LIFTING OF U.S. OIL EMBARGO; AND ARAB FOREIGN MINISTERS CONFERENCE SCHEDULED FOR TUNIS MARCH 25. END SUMMARY.

1. IN A TOUR D' HORIZON ON MARCH 11, FOLLOWING HIS RETURN PREVIOUS EVENING FROM VISIT TO CAIRO, TUNISIAN FOREIGN MINISTER HABIB CHATTI EXPRESSED VIEW THAT DESPITE CERTAIN PROBLEMS, OPPORTUNITIES FOR SETTLEMENT OF ARAB-ISRAELI QUESTION HAVE NEVER BEEN BETTER. HE SAID THAT PRESIDENT SADAT IS RIDING THE CREST OF A WAVE AND HAS FULL SUPPORT OF EGYPTIAN PEOPLE IN MAKING MOVES IN DIRECTION OF SETTLEMENT. HE ALSO ENJOYS ALGERIA'S SUPPORT. SADAT'S INFLUENCE ON PRESIDENT ASAD HAS BEEN BENEFICIAL. ACCORDING TO CHATTI, SADAT EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR TUNISIA'S LONG RECORD OF A REASONABLE AND REALISTIC APPROACH TO ARAB-ISRAELI QUESTION.

2. CHATTI SAID THAT HE HAD BEEN EXTREMELY IMPRESSED BY PRESIDENT ASAD, WHOM HE HAS MET SEVERAL TIMES, MOST RECENTLY AT LAHORE CONFERENCE. IN HIS VIEW, ASAD IS A "REAL STATESMAN". HE BELIEVES ASAD IS PREPARED TO ACCEPT A PEACE SETTLEMENT, PROVIDED U.S. CAN INDUCE ISRAELIS TO MAKE APPROPRIATE CONCESSIONS. ASAD HAS ACCEPTED PROPOSITION THAT ISRAEL IS HERE TO STAY. UNLIKE SADAT, HOWEVER, ASAD DOES NOT HAVE TOTALLY FREE HAND. HE MUST TAKE INTO ACCOUNT THE VIEWS OF "DOCTRINAIRE (BA-ATH) PARTY".

3. CHATTI INDICATED THAT WHILE THERE ARE DIFFERENCES OF VIEWS IN PALESTINIAN RANKS, IT IS CLEAR THAT PALESTINIAN CONSENSUS IS IN FAVOR OF A SETTLEMENT. HE SAID THAT HE AND OTHER TUNISIAN OFFICIALS HAD HAD GOOD TALKS WITH ABU AYAD DURING HIS VISIT HERE LAST WEEK AND WERE HOPEFUL THAT PALESTINIAN LEADERS WOULD AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN GENEVA TALKS.

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4. CHATTI RECOGNIZED THAT LIBYA AND IRAQ CONTINUE TO BE

DISSONANTELEMENTS, BUT HE DID NOT THINK THAT THIS WOULD CAUSE SERIOUS PROBLEMS, HE SAID THAT TUNISIA WELCOMES RECENT RAPPROCHEMENT BETWEEN EGYPT AND LIBYA AND NOTED WRONLY THAT LIBYA IS LINKED TO EGYPT IN TWO FEDERATION AGREEMENTS, AS WELL AS TO TUNISIA. CHATTI ADMITTED THAT

TUNISIA MUST KEEP ITS GUARD UP. IN VIEW OF QADHAFI'S UNHAPINESS WITH TUNISIA'S BACKING OFF FROM THE DJERBA DECLARATION AND QADHAFI'S BASIC UNPREDICTABILITY. HE NOTED NEVERTHELESS THAT TUNISIAN-LIBYAN " COMMISSIONS" CONTINUE TO MEET.

5. CHATTI SAID THAT SAD TOLD HIM THAT FAISAL AND BOUMEDIENE CONCURRED WITH SADAT'S VIEW THAT THE ARAB OIL PRODUCERS SHOULD LIFT THEIR OIL EMBARGO AGAINST THE U.S. WHEN I EXPRESSED SURPRISE THAT BOUMEDIENE HAD MADE SUCH A COMMITMENT, CHATTI AFFIRMED THAT BOUMEDIENE'S POSITIVE VIEWS HAD ALREADY BEEN COMMUNICATED TO WASHINGTON. HE CLAIMED THAT KUWAIT REMAINS SOMEWHAT HESITANT, WHILE QADHFI IS STILL VIGOROUSLY OPPOSED. HE SAID THE ALGERIAN MINISTER OF PETROLEUM IS DRAGGING HIS FEET, SUGGESTING THAT HE IS ON A DIFFERENT WAVELENGTH FROM BOUMEDIENE. NEVERTHELESS, HE SEEMED OPTIMISTIC THAT THE EMBARGO WOULD BE LIFTED SOON AND STRESSED THAT TUNISIA HAS NEVER FAVORED IT -- AS HE REITERATED AT A PRESS CONFERENCE HE GAVE IN CAIRO.

6. FINALLY, CHATTI INFORMED ME THAT CONFERENCE OF ARAB FOREIGN MINISTERS WOULD BE HELD IN TUNIS ON MARCH 25. HE CONTENTED THAT TUNISIA HAD BEEN SELECTED IN ORDER TO PROMOTE A CONGENIAL AND UNCONTROVERSIAL AMBIANCE.
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NOTE BY OC/T; NOT PASSED CAIRO.

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NNN

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